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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving listening skills, lack of which interferes with second language acquisition. The targeted population was first- and second-year Spanish students in one middle school and one high school. Intervention over 15 weeks included changes in the classroom environment (desk arrangement, improved lighting, creation of a visual-spatial environment conducive to listening, effective rules for class management, functional equipment for listening comprehension activities) and classroom instruction in effective listening skills, including both teacher strategies (modeling effective listening, minimizing teacher-dominated talk, varying the speaker, using cooperative groups, giving clear directions, using timing to enhance listening, discussing bias/prejudice in listening, using short listening periods throughout class) and student learning strategies (discussing attitudes about listening, working in cooperative groups, blocking out external distractions, asking clarifying questions and paraphrasing, thinking and using self-discipline techniques before responding). Results indicate improved student listening skills and understanding of content. (Contains 21 references. (MSE)

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IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving poor listening skills that interfere with foreign language acquisition. The targeted population consisted of first and second year Spanish students in one middle school and one high school. Both schools are in upper middle class communities located in northern Illinois.

Probable causes found in research literature state that listening is the most neglected communication skill, parents and teachers do not model effective listening skills, and it is not a part of most school curriculums. Research also reveals that television has impacted student listening skills by creating passive listeners with short attention spans who are easily distracted by outside influences and not educated in the needed listening skills.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others resulted in the selection of two major categories of interventions: implementation of a listening skill program in the curriculum provided by the teacher-researcher; and the introduction of effective student listening skills through modeling and practice.

Post intervention data indicated a substantial improvement in listening skills and an increased understanding of the content. With the improvement of the listening skills came a higher level of academic achievement for the targeted students.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted first and second year Spanish classes exhibit poor listening skills that interfere with Foreign Language acquisition. The targeted group for site A is 29 seventh grade students. At site B, the targeted group consists of 6 freshmen, 17 sophomores and 1 junior. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher surveys and student surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

This research project will be taking place in two schools. Site A is a middle school while site B is a high school. The teacher/researcher for each site works within each schools foreign language department. The primary responsibility is to teach students the Spanish language.

Site A

This middle school consists of 858 students. The school population is made up of a vast majority of Whites and a small percentage of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. Table 1 presents the racial and ethnic background of the students at this site. Five percent of the students come from low-income families. Low-income students are from families receiving public aid, being supported with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The remainder of the student body consists mainly of upper middle-class families.

The school consists of two eighth-grade teams, two seventh-grade teams, four sixth-grade teams, and one gifted team. The seventh and eighth grade teams each consist of a Mathematics, English, Social Studies, and Science teacher. The sixth-grade teams consist of five teachers who divide up the Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Reading and Science classes. In addition, the school consists of the Physical Education, Foreign Language, Arts & Technology, Music Departments, and Special Services teachers.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/P Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
School	84.6%	1.3%	6.1%	8.0%	0.0%	858
District	88.0%	1.3%	5.4%	5.2%	0.0%	7,514

The staff consists of 51 full-time teachers and 8 part-time teachers. There are 8 eighth-grade teachers, 8 seventh-grade teachers, 10 sixth-grade teachers, and the rest are Special Service teachers and department teachers. The average years of teaching experience are 18.56 years.

Site B

This high school consists of 2,824 students. This represents the enrollment figure as of January 30, 1997. Current enrollment is approximately 3,000 students. The school population is made up of a vast majority of Whites and a small percentage of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. Table 2 presents the racial and ethnic background of the students at this site. Less than 4% percent of the students come from low-income families. Low- income students are from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent

children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The dropout rate for the 1995-1996 school year was 2.6%. This rate is based on the number of students in grade 9-12 who dropped out during the school year. Average class size at the school is 20.1. This figure is computed for the whole school, based on average class sizes for the second and fifth periods. For the period 1994-1996 the school was named a National Blue Ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education. This distinguished award is given to schools that exhibit excellence in education.

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ P. Islander	Native American	Enrollment
School	94.9%	0.5%	2.8%	1.7%	0.1%	2,824
District	95.1%	0.6%	2.4%	1.8%	0.1%	9,503

In conclusion, although the population is quite different from the middle school to the high school in regard to numbers, the two schools are very similar in regard to ethnic and economic status.

The Surrounding Community

The two schools where the research is being done are both located in the northwest suburbs of a Midwestern state. Both schools have received awards in education; although site A spends approximately $2000.00 more per pupil. The difference may be due partially to the fact that 70% of the teachers have masters degrees and above at site A while 56.2% of the faculty have

masters degrees or above at site B.

Site A

This is a community unit school district in a northwest suburb of a Midwestern state. This school district has been awarded three Ribbons for Excellence in Education by the U.S. Department of Education. This award is based on the districts success in meeting high academic standards and creating quality educational opportunities for students. The district serves a 72 square mile area covering this suburb and all or part of nine neighboring suburbs. More than 6,800 students are enrolled at its eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The per pupil expenditure is estimated at $7,607. The per capita income ranges from $30,000 and $60,000 in a predominantly White upper middle-class community. After two consecutive attempts at passing a school-improvement referendum, it was finally passed on April 2, 1997. This will enable the school district to build two new elementary schools and put an addition on the new middle school that is too small. This school was opened in 1992. These improvements will accommodate the projected enrollment increase up to the year 2002.

It is the purpose of this district as proclaimed in the district mission statement, "to help each student pursue excellence in learning through caring schools." Toward that mission the district is guided by its Strategic Plan which was developed through the cooperation of faculty, students, parents and community leaders. Ongoing strategies include: unity of students, staff, parents, community and board; development of facility improvement plans; use of the school improvement planning process within the buildings; assurance of fiscal responsibility; provision of adequate funding; and exploration of alternative delivery systems.

The average teaching experience is 15 years, with 30% of the faculty having bachelor degrees and 70% having master degrees and above. The administration of the district has been restructured due to the loss of various administrative officials. Due to the problems of the administration, the tax payers of the district have been openly critical of the school district.

Site B

This is a community unit school district in a far western suburb of a large metropolitan area of a Midwestern state. It serves 9,753 students in one high school, three middle schools, and 11 grade schools. It covers a 57 square mile area. The school district serves an affluent predominately White community; the average assessed value of a home in the township is $171,000. The per pupil expenditure is $5,472. The average teaching experience is 12.8 years for the district, with 56.2% of the faculty having master's degrees and above. The district is growing and a referendum will be placed on the ballot for March, 1998 asking for funds to remodel and renovate. This is approximately just two years after the opening of a middle school and a high school building addition.

The school district has enthusiastically adopted a strategic plan which serves as the guideline for implementing its mission statement. The mission is to educate students who will become life-long learners and possess the skills to think critically and communicate effectively. The district mission includes nurturing students to value and demonstrate high ethical conduct, to possess positive self-esteem, to contribute to their community, and to excel among the people throughout the world. The district sees itself in partnership with an involved and supportive community.

National Context of the Problem

How does one define listening or who is identified as a good listener? There are several definitions that are useful for purposes of this project. Brent and Anderson (1993, p. 123) defined good listeners as those "who make appropriate responses to what they hear. They actually process information, make pertinent comments, and ask relevant questions." Strother (1987, p. 626) stated, "Listeners must be both docile and critical. A good listener listens with a questioning mind." According to Murphy, (as cited in Horowitz, 1966, p. 64) listening is more than hearing, it is "the accurate perception of what is being communicated." This can be referred to as "active listening" which is defined as hearing and processing the information that is heard accurately (DeBruyn, 1996). According to Lundsteen, (as cited in Strother, 1987) listening is "the process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind" (p. 625).

The problem of active listening has become a concern of American educators. Many educators around the world have voiced the same concern about the steady deterioration of the listening skills in children listening (Jolongo, 1995). Researchers in New Zealand have been studying this problem (Barnes, 1996). According to DeBruyn (1996)

> there are three levels of listening: one level is not hearing at all. Another level is listening or hearing, but not processing the communication accurately. These are both examples of passive listening. The third level is active listening—hearing and processing the information that is heard--accurately. (p. 2)

Listening needs to be active. One has to filter out what one needs to concentrate on in a message. Listening involves receiving and then processing any incoming information. Children

spend at least 25% of their time listening to teachers and peers. Students need to be taught to become active listeners so they can construct meaning from what they hear. Research has shown that children "can significantly increase their listening skills if their teachers help them to focus on what listening is" (Barnes, 1996, p. 14). A teacher has to work on this skill constantly (Barnes, 1996).

Some experts say: "Listening is one of the primary methods by which children acquire the beliefs, norms, and knowledge bases of their society" (McDevitt, 1990, p. 571). It is estimated that about 80% of knowledge is acquired through listening. Although educators are convinced there is a direct correlation between listening and learning, teaching students to listen effectively is rarely included in the public school's list of priorities.

Educators agree on the importance of listening, but few have had any formal training, inservice, or classes that address teaching methods for improving listening skills. A group of teachers were questioned on their preparedness in teaching listening skills. Not one of the group had ever received any training or attended any workshop that was specifically designed to develop children's listening skills (Jalongo, 1995).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document evidence of the effect of listening skills on student achievement, Teacher Surveys (see Appendix A) and Student Surveys (see Appendix B) were distributed and analyzed. First, the Teacher survey results will be addressed.

Teacher Surveys

Teachers were asked if they saw a correlation between listening skills and student performance in the classroom and on tests. At site A, of the 34 teachers responding to the survey, 54% strongly agreed that effective listening increased student achievement. At site B, of the 95 teachers responding to the survey, 62% strongly agreed that effective listening increased student achievement. These teachers strongly agreed that learning is affected by student listening skills, attentive students perform better on tests, and students who listen stay on task more. Forty-three percent of teachers surveyed were in agreement and 3% of the teachers disagreed at site A. At site B, 37% of teachers surveyed were in agreement and 1% of the teachers disagreed.

Secondly, teachers were asked if student listening is a problem in classrooms. At site A, of the teachers surveyed, 15% strongly agreed that poor listening skills are a problem in the classroom and 65% agreed. However, 18% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed that poor listening is a problem in their classrooms. At site B of the teachers surveyed, 9% strongly

agreed that poor listening skills are a problem in the classroom and 67% agreed. However, 21% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed that poor listening is a problem in their classrooms. Two percent of the teachers said it was not applicable.

Teachers were also asked if listening skills should be taught and if there is a direct relationship between paying attention and achievement. Teachers at site A were in 100% agreement that both of these statements were true; that is, listening should be taught and students' achievement is related to good listening skills. At site B, 94% of the teachers surveyed agreed that listening skills should be taught, 2% disagreed, and 4% had no opinion. At this site 98% of the teachers surveyed agreed that there is a direct relationship between paying attention and student achievement, 2% disagreed.

The teacher surveys support the claim that poor student listening skills affect student achievement. The result of the student surveys further support this claim.

Student Surveys

Students were asked if they considered themselves good listeners and if they listened well in the classroom. At site A, of the 28 students responding to the survey, 26% of the students considered themselves good listeners all of the time; and 72% said that they were usually good listeners. Two percent said that they were never good listeners. At site B, of the 23 students responding to the survey, 43% of the students considered themselves good listeners all of the time, and 57% said that they were usually good listeners.

Secondly, students were asked if they learned better when listening. At site A, 57% said they always learned better when listening, 40% answered that they usually did, and 3% stated that they never learned better when listening. At site B, 70% said they always learned better

when listening, 26% answered that they usually did, and 4% stated that they never learned better when listening.

The student surveys support the claim that student achievement is affected by listening skills. The results indicate that 97% of the students at site A and 96% of the students at site B agreed that they learned better when they were good listeners.

Summary

The teacher and student surveys indicate that the teachers and students are in agreement that achievement is directly affected by the effectiveness of listening skills. The surveys also indicate that there is a discrepancy in the perception of listening skills. Of the teachers surveyed, 80% of the teachers at site A and 76% of the teachers at site B stated that poor listening is a problem in the classroom. On the other hand, of the students surveyed at site A, 98% considered themselves good listeners and only 2% considered themselves not to be good listeners. At site B, 100% of the students considered themselves to be good listeners. Therefore, one of the problems the surveys indicate is that teachers and students have a different concept of what good listening skills are. This indicates that there is a lack of instruction to define and practice good listening skills.

There are many causes for the occurrence of poor listening skills. Some of the more prominent causes will be cited in the following documentation.

Probable Causes

Listening is a problem and there are many probable causes that will be discussed in this chapter. The causes that will be discussed are television, the lack of modeling good listening skills by parents and teachers, bad habits, false assumptions about listening, perceptual filters/barriers, and external distractions.

Listening-The Most Neglected Language Skill

Many educators, business leaders, and marriage counselors attest to the importance of being an effective listener but agree that teaching listening skills is a neglected part of the curriculum (Pearce, Johnson, & Barker, 1995; Strother, 1987; Wolvin, 1988). Regarding being an effective listener, Jalongo (1991, p. 7) wrote that of "all the language skills human beings acquire, listening is the one they will use the most. The sense of hearing functions even before birth, and listening becomes the dominant mode of communication for a lifetime thereafter." Wolvin (1988) also notes that among all the communication skills developed; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it is listening that is developed first.

It is estimated that students spend more than half of each school day listening (Wolvin, 1988). In a study by Rankin (as cited in Wolvin, 1988) it was found that adults spend 29.5% of their waking time listening. This accounts for 42.1% of their total communication time (Wolvin, 1988). According to Wolvin (1988), while the percentage may vary, numerous research studies verify that listening is the most frequently used communicative skill.

Listening is obviously a most critical communication skill to master, but it is one that is not easily mastered. Hunsacker's 1990 study (as cited in Brent & Anderson, 1994) stated that adults operate at no better than a 25% listening efficiency level. Bell's 1987 study (as cited in

Pearce, Johnson, & Barker, 1995) concurred with that statistic. Jalongo (1991) didn't state the efficiency percentage but simply stated that students do not listen effectively.

The problem of ineffective listening can be linked to the fact that it is not part of the curriculum (Wolvin, 1988). Strother (1988) states listening is rarely taught. Horowitz (1997, p. 64) wrote "few schools teach listening because that skill seems so simple." The trend not to teach listening skills also holds true at the college and university level as well (Pearce et al., 1995). The problem of ineffective listening is not limited to schools;

> Business and industry have responded to perceived listening deficiencies by implementing training programs. In one study, Gordon (1991) reported that 63% of a sample of organizations with 100 or more employers planned to include listening training in their annual budgets. (Pearce et al., 1995, p. 28)

The other problem linked to teaching listening skills is that teachers are not trained to teach listening skills "and they feel inadequate to try" (Funk & Funk, 1989, p. 660). The surveys conducted at both sites A and B support this fact. At site A, 29% of the teachers surveyed had not had any training in listening skills and at site B, the figure was 53%. Adding to the problem of teaching listening skills are the facts that instructional materials are scarce (Gregg, 1983), the curriculum is already overcrowded (Swanson, 1989), and as a result even "well-designed plans, however, too often lose their steam in the transition from district policy to classroom implementations." (Rubin, 1985, p. 32) Along with the problem of implementation of listening skills in the classroom there appears to be a problem of implementation of listening skill in the home due to television.

Television

Several researchers have stated that television has impacted the area of effective listening. One study done by Zabairi and Gully (1989) (as cited in Brown, 1991) stated that "watching TV led to lazy, passive listening" (p. 27). Edleston (1987) (as cited in Brown, 1991) "observed that children had a tendency to tune out while watching television and only listened to what they found of absorbing interest or very stimulating" (p. 27). Wolvin (1988) stated he believed TV has led to shorter attention spans and promoted talking while others are talking. He also indicates that TV isolates people and prevents them from interacting with one another. Lundsteen (as cited in Strother, 1987) discussed the impact of TV when she wrote, "Since the TV set cannot answer back, children do not develop skill in inquiry.... Children can have no interaction with a TV set" (p. 626). If children are not interacting they are not able to observe good listening skill habits.

Modeling

Effective listening must be modeled by parents in the home and by teachers in the class room, if students are to learn how to actively listen (Barnes, 1992; Brown, 1991; Burley-Allen, 1995). Edleston (1987) (as cited in Brown 1991) "attributed listening problems to poor modeling in the home where parents did not listen to each other attentively and did not demand good listening behavior from their children" (p. 27). Strother (1987) found studies that indicated mothers had a positive impact on their children's listening skills. Mothers who listened to their children and asked for clarification from their children when something was not clear became models of effective listening. This behavior encouraged children to listen and ask questions when they did not understand. In effect children became responsible for their listening because

they knew to ask questions when necessary.

Teachers also need to become better models for effective listening by listening to their students, by hearing them out without interruption (Jalongo,1991). Effective listening is hampered by teachers who repeat too much (Barnes, 1992), and give messages that are unclear (Strother, 1987). Brown (1991) stated that teachers contribute to the problem of ineffective listening by not giving children enough time to think and by speaking too fast. At site A, 17% of the students stated teachers repeating too much hampered their listening. At site B, 26% students cited this as a problem. At site A, 49% of the students said teachers who speak too fast and do not give enough time to think caused problems for them in listening. At site B, the figure was 26%. Effective listening can also be hampered by students' bad listening habits.

Attention

Ineffective listeners can be identified by their bad habits. These bad habits are characterized by the inability to voluntarily control attention or to stay focused (Pearce, et al., 1995; Swanson, 1989). Ineffective listeners tend to daydream (Berry, 1986; Horowitz, 1996). Ineffective listeners are apathetic (Alonso, 1996; Burley-Allen, 1995) and passive (Alonso, 1996). They do not hear the entire message (Berry, 1986). Finally, ineffective listeners are often suffering from fatigue (Burley-Allen, 1995).

Students at both sites listed these bad habits as problems for themselves in effective listening. At site A, 17% listed daydreaming, 44% listed apathy, and 43% listed fatigue. At site B, the figures were 39% for daydreaming, 41% for apathy, and 83% for fatigue. Ineffective listening skills can be changed through instruction.

False Assumptions

Some teachers make the false assumption that listening is automatic. In order to help students become better listeners, teachers have to recognize that intelligence is only part of listening and it is not automatic (Swanson,1989). It requires instructions and can be developed. As long as listening is seen as an automatic response ineffective listening will be a problem in the classroom. Students need to be made aware of the barriers to good listening.

Perceptual Filters/Barriers

People become better listeners when they are aware of the perceptual filters that they bring to the listening experience (Burley-Allen,1995; Wolvin, 1988). Personal past experiences and background will affect how one listens to a particular speaker. Individuals must be aware of their attitudes and biases toward the topic and presenter (Burley-Allen,1995; Pearce et al., 1995; Wolvin, 1988). The knowledge that both the speaker and listener have of the subject under discussion will also affect the listening process. Students need to recognize their internal biases and their external distractions that influence listening ability.

External Distractions

Teachers need to be aware of environmental factors that affect student listening. Teachers affect listening by their volume and intonation (Burley-Allen, 1995). McShane and Jones (1990) suggest teachers speak in a quiet voice so students will listen more closely. If class management is poor and there is disruptive behavior in the class, listening suffers (Jalongo, 1995; Burley-Allen, 1995). Other factors that cause students' listening problems are room temperature-either too hot or too cold and lighting (Pearce et al., 1995). Student survey results revealed that 26% of the students at site A and 39% of the students at site B cited class rooms that were too hot or too

cold affected their listening.

Educators agree on the importance of listening but few have had any formal training, inservice, or classes that address teaching methods for improving listening skills (Jalongo, 1995). Because of the lack of training, the modeling and instructing of listening skills have been neglected. The bad listening habits of students have been perpetuated by television, inattentiveness, perceptual filters, and environmental distractions. There are, however, strategies that can be implemented to improve listening.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Based on the research has been done, there is a need to identify to students the lack of good listening skills among students and that this effects their acquisition of knowledge (Brent & Anderson, 1993). The students need to voluntarily control attention to understand nonwritten messages (Swanson, 1989). Swanson (1989) labeled the inability to do this "illistenacy". Berry (1986) explains that a conscious effort must be made to attend closely in order to hear. Wolvin (1988) states that singers, cartoonists, business executives and counselors call attention to our failure to listen. Wolvin (1988) further states that individuals do not engage in the interrelated steps of the listening process.

Strategies will be presented in two parts. The first part will include the strategies for teachers to instruct students in better skills. The second part will provide strategies that students can use to improve their listening effectiveness.

Teacher Strategies

Teacher's instructing techniques are divided into the following sections: modeling, providing purpose for listening, providing follow-up activities, using short periods of listening, varying the speaker, making directions very clear, improving listening environment, and using wait time.

Modeling. In his book on listening, Wolvin (1988) presented John Stammer's four-step MAPP listening plan. The first step is modeling, followed by assess, prepare, and practice (Wolvin, 1988). The first step will help students improve their listening effectiveness (Brent & Anderson, 1993). Radcliff University President Donald Dedmon also recognized the importance of teachers' modeling. Dedmon (as cited in Wolvin, 1988) stated, "The heart of teaching transaction is skilled oral communications. Teachers must consistently practice them and encourage the practice of them by their students. The good teacher is both a good speaker and listener" (p. 7). Brent and Anderson (1993) reiterate Wolvin's idea of the importance of a teacher modeling a particular listening strategy that is appropriate for a particular situation. Jalongo (1996) states that teachers need to model good listening habits to students. Along with modeling listening, teachers need to give a reason for listening.

Purpose for listening. Teachers need to provide a purpose for a given listening activity (Brown, 1991). "While the listening process in each transaction always stays the same - with the listener engaging in the behavior of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to the aural and/or visual messages, but the listener also engages in additional behaviors as the purposes for which he or she listens change" (Wolvin, 1988, p. 135). Selecting a purpose for listening and explaining it to the children can aid in improving communication (Jalongo, 1995). Developing an agenda for the class or an outline to follow that provides a road map for the listener as to how the information will proceed, helps clarify purpose (Pearce, et al., 1995). The children's comprehension of the information needs to be checked by follow-up activities.

Follow-up activities. Providing follow-up for a listening activity will help check children's understanding and ability to follow directions (Jalongo, 1995). Also, students will be more motivated to listen when they know they will be expected to perform a specific interesting task (Jalongo, 1995). For example, assign a child a job for the day such as repeating instructions to others or a small group (McShane & Jones, 1990). Identifying potential follow-up activities create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to listening (Rubin, 1989). Follow-up activities should be well planned, be implemented immediately after the listening activity, and be a direct extension of it. These activities give purpose to the listening and set a positive precedent for successful listening activities (Rubin, 1989). Activities need to involve short periods of time just as the student needs to have short periods of listening in the classroom.

Shorten listening periods. McShane and Jones (1990) suggest providing short intensive periods of instruction with breaks during the class/day. Students need breaks to move around because they become fatigued and incapable of keeping up. One consideration is that teachers must adjust the unreasonable amount of time they require children to listen each day (Funk & Funk, 1989). The total amount of time children are expected to listen should be reduced and listening periods should be spaced throughout the class/day (Funk & Funk, 1989). Brown (1991) agrees with the strategy of providing short listening periods throughout the day. Jalongo (1991) cites Murray and Swartz (1989) going so far as to say that there is no need for better teacher talk, but less teacher talk if there is to be improvement in pupil learning. Not only is it recommended to talk less, it is also recommended to have a variety of speakers.

Vary the speaker. A variety of speakers improves the effectiveness of listening skills. Jalongo (1996) stated that teachers need to be listeners, observers, and questioners a significant

portion of the time. Brown (1991) said "Vary the speaker" (p. 39). According to Jalongo (1995), children should spend as much time listening to one another as to the teacher. She suggested that Show and Ask as one way for students to listen to a variety of students (Jalongo, 1996). Students would bring in something to show the class and the class would then ask questions about what was presented. Children should have opportunities each day to listen to other children and fewer occasions when they must listen to the teacher (McShane & Jones, 1990). The use of cooperative groups is one strategy for children spending less time listening to the teacher.

Cooperative groups. Cooperative groups give students opportunities to participate in buddy groups and listen to different speakers as well as use active listening skills (Brent & Anderson, 1993). Group activities should focus on listening skills during reading and language (McShane & Jones, 1990). It is recommended to vary teaching methods within the same class to include lecture, small group, demonstrations, and visuals (Pearce et al., 1995). Rubin (1985) stated that students learn a great deal about small-group communication in peer response and editing circles. Children need to be taught to listen to one another. Coaching children on how to take part in small or large group discussions, how to use signals to let others know they are listening, and how to respond appropriately in different manners will improve listening skills and cooperative group participation (Jalongo, 1991). It is recommended that students need to be given clear instructions before beginning any group activity.

Clear directions. One of the most effective ways to ensure that children listen to directions is to make the directions clear to begin with (Jalongo, 1995). Telling the children that the instructions will be given once only, and using a visual aid to explain each step in the process

will help clarify as one gives directions (Jalongo, 1995). Barnes (1996) recommended that teachers need to work hard on speaking clearly and without too much busy repetition or confusing paraphrasing. Jalongo (1996) stated: "We must keep instructions simple, think them through carefully, organize them in a step-by-step fashion, try to anticipate possible sources of confusion, and give children a chance to rehearse and participate throughout" (p. 23). Active listening occurs when listeners understand the message and can act upon what they have heard (Brent & Anderson, 1993). Jalongo (1991) suggested giving directions only one at a time and then encouraging children to ask specific questions. Clarity of directions and removing outside distractions are both suggested as aids to improve listening skills. Improving the listening environment was indicated as another manner to help effective listening.

Improve listening environment. Building children's listening skills is dependent upon creating a learning environment conducive to listening (Jalongo, 1996). Brent and Anderson (1993) cited an example of a teacher who taught students to block out distractions as part of improving listening skills. The students talked about how to block out distractions, wrote a list on the board and then chose the strategy that worked best individually. After the listening activity, the strategy chosen by each student was assessed. Jalongo (1995) suggested that the students' attentiveness depends considerably on providing a well-managed classroom. Seating arrangements and lighting are two factors which effect the environment (Brown, 1991). McShane and Janes (1990) offered their recommendations to make the classroom environment more conducive to good listening. They include the use of short, clear sentences, repeating key words and phrases, presenting lessons in a sequence, adding new information daily, encouraging children to use peers for clarification, and having students repeat key messages, giving positive

reinforcement, seating poor listeners close to the speaker, encouraging eye contact, and finally presenting auditory and visual material together first and then without the visual. Smith (as cited in Brown, 1991) gave the following conditions as detrimental to the environment: a) room temperature inappropriate, b) uncomfortable seating, c) tired from sitting too long, d) inappropriate lighting, e) noisy surroundings or interruptions, f) distracting attire of the speaker, and g) illness or handicap. By modifying the environment and the way in which information is presented, the teacher can eliminate some of the obstacles interfering with student's listening skills (McShane & Jones, 1990). Pearce, et al. (1995) suggested that teachers can remove environmental distractions by closing the door, changing class seating, and adjusting the temperature. Jalongo (1991) stated, "Creating a listening environment should be a daily goal rather than an occasional one" (p. 23). Another daily goal in the classroom should be to allow students time to process.

Wait time. It is important to give children time to think (Brown, 1991). Brown suggested giving children 20 seconds to think before raising hands to respond. He stated that this will improve listening skills in children. McShane and Jones (1990) recommended having the students "wait and listen" while the teacher speaks. It is recommended that students be given time to think. It is also recommended that teachers use a slower rate of speaking when instructing.

Speak slowly. Brown (1991) stated that ineffective listening results from the presenter speaking too quickly. By slowing down speech both within and between words, using emphasis and clear intonation patterns, listening skills can be improved (McShane & Jones, 1990). It was also recommended that presenting material at a rate that the learner can handle can improve

listening skills.

All of the above strategies are recommended for teachers to improve their listening instruction and to aid students in acquiring better listening skills. There are also strategies students can use to improve listening skills.

Student Strategies

The second sets of strategies that will be recommended deal with student strategies. They include metacognitive activities, cooperative group activity assessment, self assessment of personal listening skills, self discipline, keeping an open mind and paraphrasing/clarifying. Each of these strategies will be addressed.

Metacognition. Metacognition is an essential part of effective listening (Jalongo, 1996). Alonso (1995) stated that students need to think about their process of listening. Burley-Allen (1995) suggested using two questions to help children think about listening: "What does it feel like to really listen to someone else? What does it feel like when someone really listens to you?" Listeners need to decide what kind of listening skills to use (Strother, 1987). Listening can be for appreciation, information, critical analysis, determine bias, or creative exposure (Funk & Funk, 1989). Listeners must embark on a lifelong process of developing and fine-tuning their listening skills (Strother, 1987). The listening process includes a four step process of hearing, interpretation of sound, evaluation, and response (Brown, 1991). The listener must make a conscious effort to hear and attend closely to the speaker (Berry, 1986). People have used whatever ability they have to listen without attention to how they use or misuse the listening skill for so long that they cannot identify their own errors (Brown, 1991). Brent and Anderson (1994) used a classroom situation in Ms. Hernandez's class to identify listening needs and had

students recall ways they could show they were listening. Some of these were watching the speaker, setting purposes for their own listening, forming questions as they listen and blocking out distractions. After a listening activity, the students did a metacognitive activity to assess the use of different listening skills. Listening skills became more efficient by using the metacognitive activities. Metacognitive activities can be used as individual assessment tools or as assessment tools in a cooperative group.

Cooperative group. The use of cooperative learning techniques and children working together in many different groups can be successful; however, the success depends in great part on listening skills (Jalongo, 1995)). Cooperative groups require active listeners (Brent & Anderson, 1994). A group of students should have a task and begin the discussion by reviewing listening strategies they will use. Projects and activities need to be interesting to almost all children for them to listen (Jalongo, 1996). Students need to be encouraged to settle disputes without the teacher's intervention, refer some questions back to the cooperative group, apply ideas to their own situations, find out what students know and don't know, and what they have learned through listening (Brown, 1991). Students also learn a great deal about small-group communication in peer response and editing circles (Rubin, 1985). The listening process is interactive, and there is a need for monitoring changes in listening behavior (Pearce et al., 1995). Students appreciate an environment that provides an open climate where students feel positively challenged to listen, to analyze, and support positions rather than to defend and attack (Pearce, et al., 1995). The active, empathetic listening mode can be a step in making listening work for you in a group or pair situation (Burley-Allen, 1995). Talking about what was said with

another person helps to clarify ones thinking and increases what a listener remembers (Burley-Allen, 1995). Self-assessing is one of the ways to evaluate ones participation in group activity and ones listening skills.

Self assessment. Watson and Barker (as cited in Pearce, et al., 1995) offered additional suggestions for activities for improving listening skills. One suggestion was to keep listening journals. Students noted a greater awareness of their own listening behavior by monitoring changes in their listening behavior (Pearce et al., 1995). After a discussion in a cooperative group, students might assess whether or not they effectively used a particular listening strategy (Brent & Anderson, 1993). In the study of Ms, Hernandez' class, Brent and Anderson (1993) noted how she encouraged her students to assess their own effectiveness in applying a new listening strategy. Children listen better when they know that they will be called upon to reflect and self-assess (Jalongo, 1996). Educators need to teach students self-monitoring techniques and other strategies for engaging more effectively in the listening process (Strother, 1987). These strategies include listening for ideas, concentrating, keeping an open mind, and work at listening (Strother, 1987).

Self-examination allows students to learn when certain processes are useful and when they are self-defeating. This examination lets them get in touch with exactly what is going on inside (Burley-Allen, 1988). Furthermore, Burley-Allen (1988) stated that listening to oneself is an important element of the listening process. A listening attitude of enlightened self-interest allows one to learn many things of value about oneself (Burley-Allen, 1988). Wolvin (1988) recommended keeping a log of concentration habits when one starts listening and when one "tunes out". He further recommended that this log be kept for a certain period of time and then

be turned in to the instructor (Wolvin, 1988). Assessment of listening skills should lead to a more disciplined approach to listening.

Self discipline. Horowitz (1996) stated that listening may be the most important communication skill. Murphy (as cited by Horowitz,1996) said that listening is active and something that one chooses to do. Students should be encouraged to blank out distractions (Barnes, 1996). Students must make a conscious effort to hear (Berry, 1986). Efficient listening takes energy and practice (Burley-Allen, 1995). Good listeners get actively involved in what they hear and give complete attention to what they hear (Jalongo, 1995). Swanson (1989) stated that the skill of listening involves being able to voluntarily control attention so as to understand nonwritten messages. One way to give full attention is to make eye contact which will help resist distractions (McShane & Jones, 1990). Horowitz (1996) listed some suggestions for better listening. They included reminding oneself not to let the mind wander, eliminating distractions, and avoiding mental arguing. Other aids to better listening as suggested by Berry (1986) included eliminating daydreaming, hearing what one wants, and replacing disinterest with interest Students need to block out distractions to improve listening effectiveness (Brent & Anderson, 1994).

Effective listening depends as much upon the ability to filter out distractions as it does upon taking in information (Jalongo, 1996). Jalongo (1996) also stated that having children close their eyes and imagine can help block out distractions. Teachers need to encourage students to resist external distractions and concentrate on concentrating (Burley-Allen, 1995). Strategies such as watching the speaker, focusing to block distractions, and visualizing can all help improve listening skills (Brent & Anderson, 1994). Being able to control one's mind is part

of efficient listening skills. Controlling one's mind also includes being able to control prejudices and biases.

Keep an open mind. It is recommended by Burley-Allen (1995) to keep an open mind because disagreement with the speaker can cause a psychological deaf spot. Burley-Allen (1995) suggested to evaluate and be critical of the content, not the speaker's delivery. Students should be encouraged to explore how biases affect thinking about a topic (Pearce et al., 1995).

Horowitz (1996) stated that people are often biased against others based on race, gender, age, physical appearance and even "words" that rub the wrong way. Strother (1987) cited a pamphlet put out by Sperry Corporation (1985) that listed effective keys to listening. Included in these were to judge content, not delivery, avoid jumping to conclusions, keep an mind open and emotions in check (Strother, 1987). Pearce, et al. (1995) recommended encouraging students to explore how biases affect thinking about a particular topic. Effective listening concentrates on content and clarifies content by restating.

Paraphrase/clarify. It is important to check for understanding as part of effective listening (Wolvin, 1988; Jalongo, 1995). Students need to be encouraged to discuss topics, deal with open-ended questions, and have opportunities for inquiry (Brown, 1991). Good listening can be reinforced in the classroom by allowing students to restate questions, directions or explanations or other student's answers (Funk & Funk, 1989). Talking about what was said with another person helps to clarify thinking and increase what is remembered (Burley-Allen, 1995). It was also suggested that asking questions helps to clarify understanding (Burley-Allen, 1995). An active, involved listener does a lot of talking because he uses words to "mirror back" what he thinks he heard (Wolvin, 1988).

Knowing how to paraphrase is a very useful listening skill. Paraphrasing can be used to ask for clarification (Wolvin, 1988). Children need to be able to discern where communication has broken down. As listeners, students need to take responsibility for requesting clarification when necessary (Strother, 1987). Pearce, et al. (1995) stated that better listening is developed through paraphrasing internally /externally. Good listeners are those who make appropriate responses to what they hear. According to Brent and Anderson (1993) there needs to be active processing of information and asking of appropriate questions. Strategies such as summarizing and formulating questions help improve listening skills (Brent & Anderson, 1994). Jalongo (1996) suggested that strategies to increase active listening include restating, summarizing, and reflecting by the listener. Jalongo (1995) stated that children should play a major role in formulating questions. Listeners need to develop productive listening habits, which include: making predictions, identifying and summarizing main ideas and responding to what is heard. Listeners need to be coached in how to diplomatically ask specific questions that will clear up any confusion (Jalongo, 1995). Horowitz (1996) recommended checking with the speaker for accuracy by paraphrasing and summarizing. Lundsteen (as cited in Strother, 1987) found that to formulate simple questions is frequently included in listening scholars' lists of important comprehensive listening skills. By questioning there is a sharing of responsibility for accurate communication (Wolvin, 1988).

Summary

There is a two-edged strategy for improving effective listening skills. According to all of the resources studied, the problem of ineffective listening skills needs to be addressed by the teacher and the student. The teacher and student strategies cited above will be used in our

research project as possible solutions for the problem of "illistenacy". These strategies will be implemented and the results will be assessed to see if they do improve listening effectiveness in our target groups.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the use of listening skills strategies during the period from September, 1997 to December, 1997, the first and second year Spanish classes at sites A and B will increase their ability to listen effectively, as evidenced by student surveys, student checklists, teacher checklists, and teacher journal entries.

In order to accomplish the project outcomes the following processes are necessary:

1. Researchers will develop lesson plans to teach effective listening skills.
2. Researchers will encourage students to use strategies and monitor their progress.

Project Action Plan

In order to implement our action plan we will improve the listening environment in our classrooms by providing the following:

appropriate desk arrangement

adequate lighting

a visual-spatial environment conducive to listening

effective rules for class management

functioning equipment for listening comprehension activities

Activities to implement our action plan include the following;

teacher checklist completion (see Appendix C)

student checklist completion (see Appendix D)

listening comprehension activities

weekly teacher journal entries

Week 1

Teachers send parent letters home and distribute teacher surveys.

Week 2

Teachers collect and analyze teacher surveys.

Teachers distribute, collect, and analyze student surveys.

Week 3

Teachers identify and label ineffective listening as a problem in class. Discuss implications in class with students.

Weeks 4 & 5

Teacher Strategy- Introduce the first of Stammer's four step listening plan which is modeling effective listening techniques.

Student Strategy- Answer the following questions and then share their answers in cooperative groups.

What does it feel like to really listen to someone else?

What does it feel like when someone really listens to you?

Teacher listening checklist

Week 6

Teacher Strategy- Minimize teacher dominated talk.

Student Strategy- Cooperative group activity will use content matter to highlight effective listening skills.

Weeks 7 & 8

Teacher Strategy-Vary the speaker; continue to use cooperative groups.

Student Strategy-Self-discipline: block out external distractions in group work.

Student listening checklist

Week 9

Teacher Strategy- Give clear directions.

Student Strategy-Check for understanding by asking clarifying questions and paraphrasing.

Week 10

Teacher Strategy- Use ten seconds wait time.

Student strategy- Work at listening and think before raising hand.

Teacher listening checklist

Weeks 11 & 12

Teacher Strategy- Discuss bias/prejudice in listening.

Student Strategy-Keep an open mind toward topic and presenter.

Weeks 13 &14

Teacher Strategy-Use short listening periods throughout class.

Student Strategy- Review self-discipline concepts of effective listening.

Student listening checklist

Week 15

Teachers distribute, collect, and analyze student survey B. (see Appendix E)

Methods of Assessment

To assess student improvement, a variety of assessment tools will be used. These tools include student survey B, teacher and student checklists, and teacher journal entries.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to address the problem of poor listening skills in the classroom setting. The implementation of teacher strategies and student strategies was selected to improve student listening skills.

During the research period, teachers modeled good listening skills, provided purposes for listening, shortened listening periods, improved the learning environment, presented clear directions, used wait-time and follow-up activities, and varied the speakers. Each of these strategies was incorporated into the content being taught.

During this same research period, students were instructed in the use of effective listening strategies. These strategies included metacognitive and cooperative group activities, self evaluation of listening skills, the practice of self-discipline, attention to the presenter without bias, and the technique of paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions. Each of these student strategies was practiced for a one to two week period.

Delayed administrative approval for the parent letter caused the beginning of the research period to be postponed at both sites. The order in which the teachers' strategies were presented and the amount of wait time varied from the original action plan at site B based on feedback of observing administrators. At site A, two weeks were combined for one strategy because they

were both shortened weeks.

The student survey was revised. This was necessary after the survey was administered to the target group at site A. It was determined that the survey needed to be more specific. Therefore, the students at site A completed the students survey two times. The number of students answering the survey varied from survey A to B, due to student absences and transfers. These surveys were then analyzed.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The following assessment tools were utilized to compile data: student surveys A and B, student checklist, and teacher checklist. The results will be described in the following text.

Student Surveys

In order to assess the effectiveness of the listening strategies presented, student surveys were completed at the beginning and end of the action plan period. On the second student survey completed at site A, 26 students responded to the survey. At site B, 22 students responded to the survey. At site A, 12% percent of the students considered themselves good listeners all the time, and 81% of the students said that they were usually good listeners. Seven percent said that they were never good listeners. At site B, 25% of the students considered themselves good listeners all the time, and 73% of the students said that they were usually good listeners. Two percent said they were never good listeners. The interventions, thus, do not appear to have had a substantial effect on the students since on the first survey a higher percentage of students stated they were always good listeners. However, the survey results indicate a change in the student's perception of what makes a good listener. Therefore, on the second survey they may have answered more accurately. In contrast to the percentage results of the survey, 73% of the

students at site A and 64% of the students at site B stated that the listening strategies improved their listening skills.

The causes for not listening remained the same from the pre to the post survey. It was noted, however, that at site B, the 32% of students who stated that the strategies did not help them to learn and listen, also indicated more reasons for what keeps them from listening than the 64% who said they were helped by the strategies. The three most striking examples of this were in the following categories; teachers repeat too much, I do not care, and I am distracted by other students. Student checklists were also used.

Student Checklist

The strategies observed and assessed were 1) performing assigned tasks, 2) asking clarifying questions, 3) listening to the speaker, and 4) understanding the concept of the content area.

Based on the completion of the initial student checklist completed on October 27, 1997, 67% of the students at site A and 94% of the students at site B implemented the targeted strategies successfully. On the second checklist completed on December 18, 1997, 86% of the students at site A and 96% of the students at site B successfully implemented the targeted strategies successfully at site A. This implies a significant improvement in listening skills. Based on students checklists, 87% of the students achieved an acceptable understanding of the content material at site A. The figure at site B was 94%. A teacher checklist was also used to evaluate the progress in acquiring good listening skills and its effect on student achievement.

Teacher Checklist

The teacher checklist at site A, showed student achievement increased to a higher level

or sustained a high level throughout the research period. Seventy-five percent of the students improved their level of achievement throughout the research period, while 25% of the students maintained a high level of achievement. Every student showed improvement in listening skills based on the teacher checklist results. These observations took place on October 13, 1997 and November 20,1997.

The students at site B did not show the same level of improvement. Seventeen percent of the students showed improvement in their level of achievement and 83% maintained their level of achievement. Four percent showed improvement in listening skills, 2% did not show improvement, and 94% remained the same. Teacher journals were also used to record and observe student listening behaviors.

Teacher Journals

Teacher journal entries showed that when student listening behaviors improved, the level of achievement also improved. Students performed better in class when practicing a particular listening strategy. The teacher's use of wait time helped slow-processing students to improve class participation and demonstrate mastery of content area. For example, when students took time to think first before raising their hands, student participation and listening improved. When students were asked to paraphrase what was said, they consciously listened more attentively. These were some of the strategies that were observed in the journal entries. All of the assessment tools led the researchers to the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, the students showed improvement in listening skills and an increased understanding of the content area. The majority of students stated that the listening strategies improved their listening skills. With the improvement of the listening skills came a higher level of achievement in the content area.

Teacher-researchers recommend using fewer strategies for longer periods of time or implementing the action plan for a longer time period. Some of the skills needed to be practiced for a longer period of time to acquire proficiency. Also, more time needs to be used to acquaint students with the meaning of good listening. It is believed that survey A was completed by students without a full understanding of the terms used. Therefore, the second survey could not be validly compared to the first survey. The students had a different understanding of the terms used after the listening strategies had been presented.

Some of the strengths of the action plan were the successful strategies. All of the strategies chosen were beneficial. For example, instructing students to listen with an open mind to the speaker's message helped students learn to listen regardless of who the speaker is. Therefore, students realized that they can learn from anyone which increases their knowledge. Secondly, teaching students to consciously listen emphasized that listening is work and requires self -discipline. When students worked at listening their achievement in the content area improved. The teacher and student strategies improved listening skills as well as student achievement. Also, the strategies made the teacher researcher aware of teaching techniques that have a positive effect on student learning. For instance, when the teacher gave clear directions, modeled good listening, talked for shorter periods of time, and used wait time, students were

more receptive to learning. In addition to this, students became aware of the need to learn to listen and the strategies needed to accomplish this.

As stated in the national context of Chapter One, listening is an active skill that involves receiving and processing information. This skill can be increased if teachers introduce appropriate listening skills to students. The teacher and student strategies cited above were effective in teaching students that listening is an active skill and can improve achievement. Educators believe there is a direct correlation between listening and learning. This research project supports that correlation. The assessment tools used in this study indicated that to be true. This research also supports the belief that the improvement of listening skills will occur when students receive appropriate instructions on how to listen effectively.

Further research needs to be done to determine if students retain the use of the strategies taught without further instruction. It would also be beneficial to continue the study with a cross-discipline team of educators to observe if this study has improved listening and learning across the curriculum. It would also be recommended that a colleague conduct the teacher checklist to verify the findings. This would ensure an unbiased observation.

In conclusions, the teacher- researchers believe that if more teachers and students learned to use the listening strategies presented in this study, the overall achievement of students would increase. Therefore, the recommendation is that teachers learn these strategies so that they can instruct their students to use them.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER SURVEY

As part of my master's project I am doing research on listening as a skill and how it affects learning. Please fill out the survey and return to my mail box by Thursday, September 25.

Thank you.

1. Is learning affected by student listening skills?

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

2. Is student listening a problem in your classroom?

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

3. Do attentive students perform better on tests?

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

4. Do students who listen stay on task more?

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

5.Have you ever had any training in listening skills?

Yes No

6. Do you think listening skills should be taught?

Yes No

7. Do you think there is a relationship between students who pay attention and student achievement? Yes No

Please explain your answer.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY A

1. Do you think you listen well in class?

Always Usually Never

2. Do you learn better when you listen?

Always Usually Never

3. Are you a good listener?

Always Usually Never

4. What keeps you from listening? Circle all that apply

Teacher speaks too fast

Teacher repeats too much

Not enough time to think

Not interested in subject matter

Class environment; too hot, too cold

List ary others

I daydream

I am tired

I do not care

I am distracted by other students

I am distracted by other noises

5. What helps you listen?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER CHECKLIST

Student name _____

Week	Performs assigned task	Asks clarifying questions	Listens to speaker	Understands concepts presented	Comments
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

APPENDIX D

STUDENT CHECKLIST

Student name _____

Week	Performs assigned task	Asks clarifying questions	Listens to speaker	Understands concepts presented	Comments
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

APPENDIX E

STUDENT SURVEY B

1. Do you think you listen well in class?

Always Usually Never

2. Do you learn better when you listen?

Always Usually Never

3. Are you a good listener?

Always Usually Never

4. What keeps you from listening? Circle all that apply

Teacher speaks too fast

Teacher repeats too much

Not enough time to think

Not interested in subject matter

Class environment; too hot, too cold

List any others

I daydream

I am tired

I do not care

I am distracted by other students

I am distracted by other noises

5. What helps you listen?

6. Have the strategies for improving listening skills helped you to learn and listen? Yes No
Please explain.